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FOR JIM MARTIN

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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA PUBLIC OPINION: FAVORABLE TOWARD U.S. AND
CPP

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED/NOFORN. NOT FOR INTERNET
DISTRIBUTION.

11. (SBU/NOFORN) In a recent Cambodia public opinion poll, 87 percent of respondents had a favorable opinion of the United States. International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted the public opinion survey in February 2008 and found public opinion of the U.S. higher than for any other country identified. An increasing number of respondents believe the country is headed in the right direction -- 77 percent in February 2008 up from 71 percent one year ago. Eighty-six percent of Cambodians polled agreed with a trial of top Khmer Rouge leaders. When asked which party respondents choose for the upcoming National Assembly election, 59 percent stated they choose the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), compared to 15 percent for the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP). The SRP lost eight percentage points of support in this opinion poll compared to IRI's last survey in August 2007. During this poll, interviews were conducted with 2,000 respondents from 22 out of 24 Cambodian provinces. Some survey information about attitudes toward foreign countries, party support in the upcoming National Assembly election, confidence in leaders, and other information was released to U.S. Mission staff only and was not shared with the political parties or with the public. This information is marked "NOFORN" throughout this report. The full IRI report is with the Cambodia Desk at the Department. IRI presented other, unrestricted survey findings with the Council of Ministers and major political party representatives, and will hold a press conference the latter half of May to disseminate the survey's public findings. We will share the public portion with other Embassies and orally brief them on some of the more sensitive findings. From IRI's presentation to Deputy Prime Minister Sok An, there were indications that Prime Minister Hun Sen reviews IRI opinion poll data.

Most Cambodians Hold A Favorable Opinion of the U.S.

12. (SBU/NOFORN) IRI conducted its most recent public opinion survey in January and February 2008, conducting 2,000 valid interviews resulting in a survey outcome with a (plus or minus) 2.8 percent margin of error. During the survey, 87 percent of respondents had a favorable opinion of the U.S.: 54 percent responded they have a "very favorable" opinion of the U.S., 33 percent "somewhat favorable", four percent "somewhat unfavorable", eight percent "very unfavorable". Compared to an August 2007 IRI survey when more than 90 percent of respondents held a positive opinion of the U.S., this year's percentage of favorable ratings are slightly lower. However, in 2007 the survey question was worded differently, asking Cambodians how confident they were in the U.S.

13. (SBU/NOFORN) In the 2008 survey, the age groupings

holding the most favorable views of the U.S. were ages 40 to 49 (58 percent "very favorable" and 33 percent "somewhat favorable") and ages 30 to 39 (60 percent "very favorable", 30 percent "somewhat favorable"); the age groups with the lowest percentage of favorable ratings were ages 60 and older (42 percent "very favorable", 39 percent "somewhat favorable") and ages 18 to 24 (50 percent "very favorable" and 35 percent "somewhat favorable"). Ninety-two percent of respondents who support the SRP held favorable opinions of the U.S. compared to 85 percent of CPP supporters, 91 percent of Human Rights Party (HRP), 89 percent Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), and 87 percent FUNCINPEC. The U.S. received higher favorability ratings than all other countries in the poll: (in order of favorability) Japan, the U.K., France, Australia, Thailand, Canada, South Korea, China, North Korea, Malaysia, India, Laos, Russia, Vietnam, Burma, Saudi Arabia. Of note, 77 percent of respondents gave favorable ratings for Japan; 74 percent for the U.K.; 71 percent for France; 70 percent for Australia; 62 percent for China; 53 percent for North Korea; 39 percent for Russia; 34 percent for Burma; and 20 percent for Saudi Arabia.

Cambodia is Headed in the Right Direction

¶4. (SBU) During the February 2008 survey, 77 percent of those surveyed believe the country is headed in the right direction, up from 60 percent in August 2006, 71 percent in January 2007, and 75 percent in August 2007. The building of roads and schools, along with other infrastructure, is the top reason why respondents believe the country is headed in the right direction. Twenty percent of those surveyed in

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2008 believe the country is headed in the wrong direction, down from 37 percent in August 2006, 29 percent in January 2007, and 22 percent in August 2007. Among reasons stated why Cambodia is headed in the wrong direction were high prices of goods, corruption, and poverty.

Strong Showings for CPP; Decreasing Support for SRP, FUNCINPEC, NRP

¶5. (SBU/NOFORN) Responding to an open-ended question about which party they would choose for the July 2008 National Assembly election, 59 percent of those polled stated they choose the CPP, a one-percent increase over the August 2007 poll results. During the February 2008 poll, 15 percent of respondents said they choose the SRP, eight percentage points less than during the August 2007 poll. Twelve percent of respondents were undecided, an increase of six percentage points over 2007. (NOTE: It appears that the SRP decline in support from 2007 moved to the undecided group. END NOTE.) IRI Country Director John Willis pointed out that support for the CPP in this survey roughly matched CPP wins in the April 2007 commune council elections -- the CPP won 61 percent of commune council positions. However, according to the survey, the SRP has seen a decrease in support since the April 2007 commune council elections. During those elections, the SRP won 25 percent of commune council positions compared to the 18 percent of 2008 survey respondents who either stated they will choose the SRP in the National Assembly elections, or who are undecided and will very likely vote for the SRP in any election. Although IRI's official survey presentation did not include this information, John Willis told Emboffs that the SRP had a relatively high amount of support among civil servant survey respondents. Seven percent of respondents stated they will choose the Human Rights Party (HRP) in the National Assembly elections, and three percent of undecided respondents stated they would be very likely to vote for the HRP in any election. Both FUNCINPEC and the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) appear to have lost support since the 2007 commune council elections when FUNCINPEC won five percent of positions and the NRP won eight percent. During the February 2008 survey, three percent chose

FUNCINPEC and five percent NRP. Of undecided respondents, one percent said they were very likely to vote for FUNCINPEC in any election, and two percent said the NRP.

Does CPP Stand for the Confident, Positive Party?

16. (SBU/NOFORN) When the statistics are broken down by political party support, the survey shows that 91 percent of CPP-supporting respondents believe that Cambodia is headed in the right direction compared to 52 percent of SRP, 43 percent of HRP, 62 percent of NRP, and 66 percent of FUNCINPEC supporters. In response to the question, "How confident are you in the following leaders?" 88 percent said confident compared to 11 percent unconfident in Hun Sen. When asked about Sam Rainsy, 58 percent said confident and 36 percent said unconfident. For Prince Norodom Ranariddh, those percentages were 50 and 45, respectively. For Kem Sokha, 38 percent confident and 23 percent unconfident. In response to questions about how confident respondents are that a particular party can solve national problems such as the high price of goods, drug trafficking, health care, high crime, corruption, degradation of the environment, and land taking, for all problems, the CPP brought in a higher percentage of "very confident" responses than the SRP, HRP, NRP and FUNCINPEC. FUNCINPEC received the lowest confidence votes across the board. When survey participants were asked whether the CPP would let go of power if the CPP lost the National Assembly election, 40 percent said they believed it was likely and 37 percent said unlikely -- the remainder responded that they didn't know.

What are the Issues?

17. (SBU/NOFORN) According to the poll results, many Cambodians choose their party based on beliefs about who will improve infrastructure -- 40 percent stated building roads was their reason for voting, 36 percent said schools, 15 percent said health clinics, and 12 percent said bridges. Lower down on the list were building pagodas and irrigation canals. Twelve percent of all respondents stated they would vote for their preferred party because the party "ended the Pol Pot regime". Eleven percent cited living conditions, and eight percent said corruption issues. The responses broke

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down somewhat differently when the political party of respondents was taken into account. CPP voters made up the vast majority of those concerned with infrastructure. The SRP and HRP supporters indicated they vote for their parties because of corruption issues and living conditions.

18. (SBU) Respondents were asked several different questions about why they would vote for a particular political party. In one question the most popular responses out of a limited set of possible responses were: has capable leaders, and has solutions that affect your daily life. In a different question with a different set of possible responses the most popular responses were: fight corruption, build roads, and create jobs.

Sok An and Staff, CPP, NRP, and FUNCINPEC React

19. (SBU/NOFORN) IRI has thus far presented unrestricted survey results in separate meetings with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Council of Ministers Sok An and his staff, and CPP, NRP and FUNCINPEC representatives. A USAID officer who attended the meeting with Sok An reported that Sok An recalled part of a conversation with the Prime Minister about previous poll results indicating that Hun Sen is reviewing IRI poll data. Sok An also made general comments related to survey questions about policy solutions to corruption, poverty and land-taking. When IRI showed presentation slides of poll results regarding democratic

concepts such as free media, transparency, and selecting leaders, Sok An asked questions about how these work in the U.S., specifically: What are the rules in the U.S. regarding candidates' use of TV air time during election season?

"Doesn't the U.S. have a problem with some stations being pro-Democrat, such as CNN, and others pro-Republican, such as FOX?" What is the rule in the U.S. regarding disclosing the source of donations to political parties? And, what country in the world puts term limits on the Prime Minister?

¶10. (SBU) In separate meetings with CPP, NRP and FUNCINPEC, party members generally had few questions. CPP Cabinet Chief and Central Committee Member Senator Tep Ngorn stated that the CPP is concerned about corruption. During the meeting with NRP members, NRP Secretary General and parliamentarian You Hokry expressed apprehension related to some of the restricted results shared only with parties being released to the general public.

Dream Team Wake-Up Call?

¶11. (SBU/NOFORN) Similar to the 2007 public opinion survey, IRI asked respondents in February 2008 who they would vote for if Sam Rainsy formed a coalition with Kem Sokha and Prince Norodom Ranariddh. In February, 40 percent stated they would vote for the coalition, showing a 13 percent "coalition bonus" over the total percentage points if one just added the percentage support for each of the three candidates. In the 2007 poll, 49 percent of respondents stated they would vote for the coalition, and 46 percent stated they thought this coalition would win the election. Asked about a coalition between Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha, 37 percent of respondents in the 2008 survey stated they would vote for the coalition, compared to a total of 22 percent if one simply adds the percentage of support for each of the two candidates on their own. (Comment: The realistic time for coalition-building was in the fall of 2007; the last opportunity for parties to form pre-election coalitions passed on May 12, with the deadline for parties to register with the National Election Committee. End Comment.)

Khmer Rouge Tribunal On Solid Ground with Cambodians

¶12. (SBU/NOFORN) Eighty-six percent of Cambodians polled agreed with a trial of top Khmer Rouge leaders (69 percent "very much agree" and 17 percent "somewhat agree") compared to five percent responding that they disagreed with a trial (two percent "somewhat disagree" and three percent "very much disagree"). In response to a question about whether those surveyed are aware of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT) that is putting top Khmer Rouge leaders on trial, 71 percent said they were aware; 29 percent said they were not. The age groups most aware of the KRT were those age 60 and older and age 50 to 59 (79 percent of each group said they were aware) with the younger age groups being less aware: 66 percent of age groups 18 to 24 and 25 to 29 stating they were aware of

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the KRT.

Survey Respondent Demographics

¶13. (SBU) Half of the 2,000 survey respondents were female; 96 percent were Khmer. The survey was conducted in all provinces except Mondulkiri and Oddar Meanchey, remote provinces with small populations. Respondents from rural areas made up 85 percent of respondents, and urban the remaining 15 percent. Thirty-one percent of those surveyed reported a monthly family income of USD 21 to 50 per month, another 31 percent earned USD 51 to 100. Five percent reported income of USD 10 or less, and four percent reported income of more than USD 300. The breakdown of age distribution was as follows: 14 percent age 18 to 24, 14

percent 25 to 29, 23 percent 30 to 39, 22 percent 40 to 49, 16 percent 50 to 59, and 12 percent 60 and older. Twenty-one percent of respondents had received no formal education, 49 percent had a primary-level education, 30 percent secondary-level or higher.

Comment

¶14. (SBU/NOFORN) We are not surprised by the overall favorable Cambodia public opinion toward the U.S. given the positive statements we have heard from everyday Cambodians throughout the country. We take particular heart in Cambodians' favorable opinions compared to public opinion in many other countries -- a 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Survey showed that only two out of 47 countries surveyed matched Cambodia's high percentage of favorable ratings of the U.S.

¶15. (SBU/NOFORN) We note that the recent IRI survey was conducted before the recent surge in prices worldwide that has also harshly affected Cambodia and its substantial proportion of impoverished citizens. IRI is not able to mount another survey before the July 27 National Assembly elections that could show observers how inflation has affected public opinion. The ruling CPP party might stand to lose ground due to perceptions that the government is not doing enough to curb high prices.

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